



## **Testimony of Yasmina Vinci**

Executive Director of the National Head Start Association  
Alexandria, Virginia

Before the House Appropriations Committee's  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Regarding FY 2011 Budget Priorities

Public Witness Hearing on Wednesday May 12, 2010 at 10:00 a.m.

### **Testimony Summary:**

Ms. Vinci's testimony addresses the need for adequate appropriations for Head Start programs under the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



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Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Tiahrt, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the critical needs of Head Start and Early Head Start (collectively "Head Start") in the context of the fiscal year 2011 Budget and Appropriations.

Chairman Obey, given the recent announcement of your pending retirement, I would like to take a quick moment to especially thank you for all you have done in Congress and at the helm of this Committee for years. Early childhood education and care is stronger in this country because of your efforts.

The National Head Start Association ("NHSA") is a private not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to addressing the needs of Head Start children and their families. We are proud to represent more than 1 million children, 200,000 staff, and 2,600 Head Start programs in the United States.

As you well know, Head Start, created in 1965, is evidence of the country's longest commitment to early education and care. As the leading programs for high risk children and families in the country, Head Start and Early Head Start provide comprehensive education, health, mental health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children between the ages of birth and five and to their families as well.

Dedicated to vulnerable children and families who need intensive assistance to achieve the American dream, Head Start programs across the country help children and their families to succeed by preparing them for school and for life. Not only does Head Start provide high-quality early education by a racially and ethnically diverse workforce of talented teachers and teachers' assistants, but its family service workers help Head Start families solve problems associated with unstable housing and jobs. Head Start's health workers assure that Head Start children receive necessary early periodic screening, diagnosis, and testing services, follow-up care, and vaccinations. They also assist in children getting needed dental and mental health services. Head Start parents learn best practices in parenting and become active partners in their children's education. Many Head Start programs also help parents find job-training programs and support their efforts in the workforce.

Importantly, these investments in Head Start pay dividends of many types. These Head Start dividends include scholastic preparation, improved health outcomes, and reductions in crime. For example, reliable studies demonstrate that Head Start children experience increased achievement test scores and favorable long-term effects with decreased grade repetition and reduced need for special education in

elementary and secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> Econometric analysis also suggests that Head Start reduces the high school drop out rate.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, recent research reports that Head Start reduced the mortality rates for 5- to 9-year-old children to the national average for all 5- to 9-year-old children (Head Start rates were 33 to 50 percent lower than for comparable children who were not enrolled in Head Start).<sup>3</sup> Along with improving the health of its children and families, Head Start benefits its children and society at large by reducing crime and its costs to crime victims.<sup>4</sup> Head Start children are significantly less likely to have been charged with a crime than their siblings who did not participate in Head Start.<sup>5</sup> All of these outcomes and more demonstrate that Head Start works.

More than 27 million pre-school aged children have benefited from Head Start programs so far. Graduates of Head Start are in the workforce and in public service positions in practically every community. But prior to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the "Recovery Act"), Head Start was only able to serve about 40 percent of eligible children and families. Early Head Start served even fewer, only about 2 to 3 percent of the eligible population. Thanks to Congress, however, the Head Start community has been able to extend the program's reach and to help more struggling families as the country continues to deal with an uncertain economy. Through the Recovery Act funding, Head Start and Early Head Start have been able to serve 14,000 more three- and four- year olds and 50,000 more infants and toddlers across the country. Head Start has also added approximately 24,000 more jobs in areas that did not exist before.

These Recovery Act gains are especially important, not only because the program now provides necessary supports to more families in need, but also because when children are served in Head Start programs, their parents know that they are safe, well-cared for, and in good hands. With this peace of mind, Head Start parents can join the workforce or participate in job training programs, as this newly enrolled mother of two school-age children as well as a 6-month old in Oakland CA tells: *"When I found out I was excepted [sic] into the home-based option I was excited! It was like there was an angel watching out for this new baby. I have so little income! I am in school and my husband does not make enough. He is also in school finishing his degree. We want to be in a better spot you know! We want to complete our degrees so we can build something and be better off in the long run. I could not have done this without this support. Knowing I have the chance to enter into the center option when my baby is old enough helps. I will take it! I will volunteer and give back to the program. This is just good for families."*

However, the increased numbers of children and families now assisted by Head Start and Early Head Start services still fall short of meeting the need for Head Start services in many communities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, another 1.1 million children under the age of 6 slipped into poverty

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<sup>1</sup> Barnett, W. S. (2002, September 13). The Battle Over Head Start: What the Research Shows. Presentation at a Science and Public Policy Briefing Sponsored by the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, and Cognitive Sciences; Garces, E., Thomas, D. and Currie, J. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92 (4): 999-1012.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig, J. and Miller, D. (2007). Does Head Start improve children's life chances? Evidence from a regression discontinuity design. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (1): 159-208.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Fight Crime: Invest In Kids. (2004). Quality Pre-Kindergarten: Key to Crime Prevention and School Success. Available at <http://www.fightcrime.org/> on July 23, 2004, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Garces et al. (2002, September). Longer-Term Effects of Head Start, 999-1012.

between 2001 and 2008<sup>6</sup> and those children are now on Head Start programs' waiting lists. (In Sedgwick County, Kansas, there were over 2,000 applications submitted for only 237 Head Start and Early Head Start spaces. In 5 Minnesota communities alone, 1,866 families are on waiting lists. In Berkley, CA, at just one program – Berkley-Albany YMCA, 240 families are waiting anxiously every day for a space to open.) Programs throughout the country are stretching to cope with increased health care costs for staff –for instance in Helena, MT where on July 1<sup>st</sup> there will be a 20% increase in providing health insurance (\$45,000) for the 248-child, 54-staff program.

For all of these reasons and more, NHSA strongly supports the President's Budget Proposal for fiscal year 2011 that was released in February of this year. It provides critical support for young children and their families and preserves recent gains made for these individuals by building on the historic increases provided by Congress through the Recovery Act. Specifically, the President's budget provides an additional \$989 million for Head Start and Early Head Start (beyond FY 2010's Appropriation) to continue to serve the 64,000 additional children and families funded by the Recovery Act.

The President's Budget Proposal also provides an additional \$1 billion for the Child Care and Development Fund in preparation for reauthorization to sustain child care gains, and improve health, safety, and outcomes for children. This amount will allow States to avoid cuts to families now accessing child care and NHSA supports these additional child care funds as well.

The President's Budget Proposal would allow Head Start programs to preserve the many recent gains made. After years of flat funding that did not keep up with the rate of inflation, we are moving towards paying Head Start staff wages that are consistent with their skills which will hopefully keep them working in Head Start programs, rather than having to look elsewhere for better paying jobs. Through the Recovery Act, additional jobs were created for new Head Start staff. Large infrastructure investments in local communities for new Head Start classrooms and improved playgrounds were made. And many more children and families are being served in the program. Accordingly, it would be devastating to every community across the country if Head Start suddenly had to cut back and reduce the size of the program. Numerous jobs would be lost across the country, at-risk families would be dropped from the program with nowhere else to turn, buildings would sit empty, and the gains that have been made would be lost. This country cannot afford for that to happen.

For all of these reasons and more, NHSA hereby requests that this Committee support the President's FY 2011 Budget Proposal for Head Start and other early childhood programs. We have made so much progress in a short period of time. We trust that that this Committee will continue to lead the way in ensuring that the Head Start community can make even more progress. By sustaining the Head Start commitment, together we can move early education and care into a new era for at-risk children and families.

Thank you.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov20.xls>

